

# JOURNEY IN... YEAR THREE

## ENDINGS

### DRAMA

This lesson's Big Ideas:

- Grief is what follows loss, especially death. Grief is both the hurt and the healing. Grief is never straightforward or simple or the same for two people.
- If we allow ourselves to grieve and to let others grieve, people can continue living meaningful lives.
- In most cultures, people create rituals to help them in the grieving process. One such ritual in our culture is the funeral or memorial service.
- Grief does not mean forgetting; it means remembering. In time, we remember the dead with more feelings than just sorrow. We remember them with love, with gratitude and even laughter.

Lesson Materials (Props)

- Gravestone for a bird
- Silk flowers
- Drawings
- Flags
- Photo in a frame
- Piece of jewelry
- Pretty box
- Paper and pencil
- Violin

#### TEACHER REFLECTION AND PREPARATION

⌚ Ahead of time

The deeper that sorrow carves into your being the more joy you can contain. Is not the cup that holds your wine the very cup that was burned in the potter's oven?

-Kahlil Gibran

Grief can awaken us to new values and new and deeper appreciations. Grief can cause us to reprioritize things in our lives, to recognize what's really important and put it first. Grief can heighten our gratitude as we cease taking the gifts life bestows on us for granted. Grief can give us the wisdom of being with death. Grief can make death the companion on our left who guides us and gives us advice.

- Roger Bertschausen

He who conceals his grief finds no remedy for it. ~Turkish Proverb

Sorrow makes us all children again, destroys all differences of intellect. The wisest know nothing.

- Ralph Waldo Emerson

I still miss those I loved who are no longer with me but I find I am grateful for having loved them. The gratitude has finally conquered the loss.

~ Rita Mae Brown

Blessed are those who mourn: they shall be comforted

- The New Testament – Matthew, 5:4

Take time before teaching this lesson to reflect on your own experiences with the grieving process. Which rituals and resources have been helpful to you? Are you still actively grieving any losses? of death at different developmental stages.

## **GATHERING AND FOCUSING**

🕒 5 minutes

Today we're talking about grief. Grief is the natural process of feeling sad after someone dies. With time, a person can move from being very sad most of the time to being a little sad some of the time while remembering the love and joy they shared with the person who died.

We'll make a spectrum of sadness as a class. This can be a silent activity or one that includes sound.

Line up and starting at one end, have the first child act terribly, terribly sad. Give him or her 5 seconds or so to demonstrate. The next child should act slightly less sad, and so on until the final child in the line up is only a little sad.

## **PRIMARY ACTIVITY ONE**

### **GRIEVING: SHORT SCENES**

🕒 30+ minutes

Attached you will find several short scenes that illustrate different choices, objects, rituals and practices that people may use in their grieving process. They include:

- Gravestones
- Flowers
- Drawings
- Flags to honor service
- Photos
- Mementos
- Keeping ashes
- Writing
- Music

Divide the group into several pairs. Give them each a script and a prop. Give them 5-8 minutes to run through their script. Then, have each pair take turns presenting their scene to their classmates. First graders will need help from you when reading through their scripts the first time.

### **Wondering Together**

- Which of these practices would you probably choose to help you? Why?
- Have you ever had an experience like one of these scenes? Tell us about it....

## **CLOSING AND LEAVE-TAKING**

🕒 2 minutes

Gather in a circle, take each other's hands and speak these words:

*Life and death are one and the same,  
like the river and the ocean.*

*Grief is the invisible ache in our hearts  
and grief is the healing of that ache, too.*

*Grief is like the river, too, never taking the straightest path  
but flowing where it needs to flow.*

*Love is like the ocean, too, great and deep,  
touching even the shores we cannot see.*

### Gravestones Help Us See and Remember

Kid 1: Hey, what are you writing on that stone?

Kid 2: Oh, look. I'm making a gravestone. It says "Here Lies a Bird that Has Died".

Kid 1: Hmm. What are you going to do with it?

Kid 2: Well, my friends and I found a dead robin and we're going to bury it. It seemed like the right thing to do. We got a box and some soft blue napkins. My best friend is busy digging the hole right now.

Kid 1: Yeah, but what are you going to do with the stone?

Kid 2: The stone is going to be like a marker to show where the bird's body is. So if we want to visit the spot and remember, we can. We didn't know its name, so I just wrote this message on the gravestone to say it was a bird.

Kid 1: That's sounds nice. Can I come and watch you bury the bird?

Kid 2: Sure. We're going to have a little funeral. It would be nice to have another friend there.

Kid 1: Okay. I know how to sing 'Amazing Grace. I learned it a church. Let's go.

### Flowers Show Our Love and Care

Parent: Thank you, sweetheart, for giving us those dollars and coins from your piggy bank yesterday. Would you like to see what we used the money for?

Kid: Yeah. Is it for Grandma's memorial service?

Parent: Yes, it is. We put your money together with other money from all your cousins and we got this beautiful wreath of flowers.

Kid: What's it for? I thought wreaths were for Christmas.

Parent: Well, can you read what it says on this ribbon?

Kid: It says, 'Beloved Grandmother'. Is that about Grandma Jones?

Parent: Yes. We'll put this wreath in the funeral home near Grandma's casket during the visiting time and the service.

Kid: But Grandma can't see or smell the flowers any more, you said.

Parent: That's true. This wreath shows that Grandma Jones was loved by her many grandchildren. People who visit the funeral home will see it and know that we remember her as a wonderful grandma. Your aunts and I got another wreath that says, "Mother, We Will Miss You", because Grandma Jones was our mom.

Kid: Will there be other flowers, too?

Parent: Yes, I'm sure. Grandma's friends and neighbors will send flowers to show that they care and are thinking of us in our grief.

Kid: Hmm. Well, I'm glad I had that money in my piggy bank to help get this wreath. I love Grandma even though she's died.

Parent: Me too, sweetheart.

Grownup: What's that you've got there? Are those pictures you've drawn?

Kid: Yeah. I drew one picture for me and one picture for Grandpa Jack.

Grownup: That's a good thing to do right now! Tell me about the picture.

Kid: Well, they're both the same. This is me and Grandpa Jack fishing like we did every summer. Only now we can't do that anymore because he died.

Grownup: You look pretty happy to be fishing in this picture. So does Grandpa Jack.

Kid: We were both happy when we were fishing. I'm sad, now, but I was drawing a happy memory, so that's why we're both smiling.

Grownup: I'm sad, now, too, but I know that all my happy memories are still with me. That helps make the grief a little easier to get through. You said one picture was for Grandpa Jack?

Kid: Yes. I'm going to put it in his casket tomorrow at the funeral. I know he can't see it with his eyes anymore, but I want to give it to him anyway. Then I'll put this one up on my bedroom wall and think about Grandpa every day.

Grownup: I think this is a good way to feel your feelings, this drawing stuff. And this is a very nice way to show that you care.

Kid: Thanks. I'll see you tomorrow. I have to get out my nice clothes so we can iron them.

#### We Remember Veterans with Flags

Sister: How come you're taking that flag with you to the cemetery?

Brother: Well, every year on Memorial Day, we'll put a flag on Uncle Rick's grave because he was a soldier in the Army.

Sister: Do only soldiers get flags? That's not fair. We all live in the United States of America.

Brother: I think only soldiers get flags. I think it's fair because the soldiers who fought in wars wanted to protect us and they loved the flag and their country.

Sister: But our parents say that wars and fighting aren't good ways to solve things.

Brother: Still, Uncle Rick was brave and I think it's nice to show that we remember him with a flag. I get to put it on his grave. There are lots and lots and lots of other graves that will have flags. You'll see. Men's graves and women's graves. Super old graves and new graves like Uncle Rick's.

Sister: Well, I'm not going to put a flag there. I'm going to pick some flowers from the garden and put those on his grave.

Brother: That's fine. People have to do different things to show that they miss people who have died and that they remember them. You put the flowers there and I'll put the flag.

Parent: Have you decided if you'd like to take something to share at church during the memorial service for Cousin Andy?

Kid: Yeah. Can I take this photograph? The one of me and Andy and Pat in the treehouse last summer?

Parent: That's a great idea, honey. You all had so much fun that day. I remember hearing your laughter coming from way up in the tree.

Kid: Will it make people sad to see a picture of Andy being alive like this?

Parent: It might. Most of the people at the memorial service will be feeling sad and this photo might make them cry. But that's okay. Crying is part of grieving. We'll all miss Andy very much. You don't have to feel bad if this photo makes people cry.

Kid: Actually, you know, I feel mostly happy when I see this photo. I'm glad we spent that whole day in the treehouse.

Parent: I'm glad, too! It's okay to feel happy at the good memories, too, you know.

Kid: I can bring this picture back home when it's all over, right?

Parent: Yes, of course! If this picture is important to you, you should keep it. I'll be putting a little picture of me and Andy up on the photo display, but I have other copies.

Kid: I think I'm going to hang it over my desk for a while so that I can think about Andy all the time. I don't want to forget.

Parent: You won't forget. You loved Andy too much to forget.

#### Little Treasures Can Help us Remember

Parent: You were very quiet at the funeral, sweetheart. How are you feeling?

Kid: I don't know. I'm not really sad but I'm not happy either. I just feel a little empty and tired.

Parent: That's okay. You might want to lie down for a little while before the dinner tonight. But before you do, I have something for you. This is a gift from Great-Grandma Jane.

Kid: How can Great-Grandma Jane give me a present if she has died?

Parent: Well, sometimes when people are very old and they know that it won't be too long until they die, they plan ahead to give everyone a little treasure to remember them by. Great-Grandma Jane thought of you when she was deciding who might like this piece of jewelry. She left instructions to give it to you after her funeral.

Kid: It's a little big for me right now, but it's pretty.

Parent: When you wear it, you can think of Great-Grandma. She was thinking of you.

Kid: I don't know if I can think of her. I don't remember a whole lot of things about her.

Parent: That's okay, too. Just remember that lots of people are loving you during their lifetime, even if you don't know it.

Kid: Thanks for the gift. I do like it. Maybe someday I'll have a Great-Grandkid that I can give this to.

Grownup: What's in the envelope?

Kid: You'll think it's dumb.

Grownup: Probably not. Why don't you try me?

Kid: I wrote a letter to Aunt Gert. I know she's dead and she can't read it now, but I had a bunch of things to say.

Grownup: That's not dumb at all. That's a pretty smart thing to try when you're grieving. Want to tell me some of what you said in the letter?

Kid: Well, I said first that I missed her and then I said thanks for letting me spend summers at her cabin. Then I said that I thought it was sad that she got sick and died and I wish that she wouldn't have. I wrote that maybe when I grow up, I can find a cure for the disease that she had but that I might want to be a pilot instead.

Grownup: That makes a lot of sense. Aunt Gert would have understood. I bet she'd have given you a hug after she read it.

Kid: Now that she's dead, I don't know where to send the letter.

Grownup: Hmm. You probably can't send her the letter now, but that doesn't mean it was a bad idea to write it. I bet it helped you sort out your feelings about her death.

Kid: What should I do with the letter now that I wrote it?

Grownup: Well, some people who write letters like yours keep them in a special box and read them later on, maybe on the person's birthday. I have a grown-up friend who wrote a nice letter like that, once, to a friend who had died. When the letter was finished, she carefully burnt it into ashes. Then she took the ashes of her letter and spread them at the lake where her friend's ashes had been scattered. It helped my friend feel better and share her feelings.

Kid: That's a pretty good idea. Maybe my parents can help me make ashes from my letter and maybe I can take them to Aunt Gert's cabin.

Grownup: If it helps you to feel and share your grief, I think it's worth a try.

### We Can Keep our Pet's Ashes

Kid 1: Hey, what's in this pretty little box?

Kid 2: Oh, don't open it, please. We mostly keep it closed. Inside there are ashes.

Kid 1: Ashes? Why? You don't have a fireplace.

Kid 2: They're the ashes of our dog, Rufus. He died a few months ago. I think I told you.

Kid 1: Yeah, you did tell me. It was sad. How did he turn into ashes?

Kid 2: Well, after he was dead, they burned his body until it was just this little bit of ashes. It's called cremation. You can either bury a body or you can cremate it.

Kid 1: Doesn't it make you feel creepy that these ashes are in your living room?

Kid 2: No! Not even a little. It makes me feel good because when I look at the box, I remember Rufus. It was just his body, you know. The living spirit that liked to play fetch with me and stuff was already gone.

Kid 1: Hmm. Okay. I think I'd rather bury my cat when he dies, but this is a nice box for Rufus' ashes. Are you going to keep them forever?

Kid 2: Probably, but not always right in the living room. Maybe we'll put them away someday and just take them out sometimes to help us remember.

## Music Can Help Us Grieve

Grownup 1: Are you sure you can do this?

Grownup 2: You mean play the violin? Of course! I've been playing the violin for 20 years!

Grownup 1: No, I mean play the violin at the funeral. I'm far too sad to do something like that. I'd start crying while I played.

Grownup 2: I am very sad. I've cried a lot this week. But it's really important to me to play for Mr. Biddle's funeral. He was a good friend and he loved this song.

Grownup 1: He did really love music, didn't he?

Grownup 2: Yes, he sure did and so do I. Playing at the funeral makes me feel like I can DO something with all these big feelings and memories. I need to DO something when I'm mourning.

Grownup 1: When I'm mourning a loss, I can hardly do anything. I feel tired and empty. Thank goodness that doesn't last forever.

Grownup 2: What helps the sad, empty feelings?

Grownup 1: Time. I just have to wait until one day I can think about something else other than missing the person who died. I do like to listen to sad music, because it helps the feelings get out from inside me.

Grownup 2: Well, I hope that hearing the music at the funeral helps you grieve. It will help me to play it.

# Brief Notes on Children's Understanding of Death

## Ages 3-5

While these lessons are not intended for this age group, it's important to know where the children in your Sunday School class are coming from, developmentally speaking, and to recognize that some children may still display characteristics of this stage as they grow at their own pace.

Concrete thinking is characteristic of this age, thus it is important to use the real language, simple, and direct with no euphemisms. "Lost," "passed away," or "asleep" are confusing and frightening. "Death is when the whole body stops working" is the best approach, using examples of dead birds, insects and animals that have been observed in the past.

## Ages 6-9

This age child likes to be included in the family conversation about the death, and has a greater capacity to understand. He also gets satisfaction out of "doing," so that giving him age-related tasks can be helpful. Writing a poem, drawing a picture, or writing a letter to be placed in the casket or hung on the wall is appropriate.

Death becomes real and irreversible for this age group, which can be a profound realization. Death might be personified as a bogeyman or a skeleton, and is usually seen as an external force. This child may fear that someone else will also die, so realistic reassurance that "most people live to a very, very old age" is helpful.

## Ages 9-12

These children are capable of more abstract thinking and often are fascinated by the biology of disease. They may also think that the death is a punishment for something they or someone else did wrong. They benefit from the same reassurance as younger children that they did not cause the death.

Peers become important to this age group. Some children may choose not to share with friends what is happening at home for fear of embarrassment, for being "different." They may resent that their family is not "normal".

- from Allina Grief Resources, [www.allina.com](http://www.allina.com)